



TRANSPORTATION SAFETY COMMISSION

CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

TO: Transportation Safety Commission Members, Council members, City Manager Kurt Hodgen, Assistant City Manager Evan Vass

FROM: Thanh H. Dang, Public Works Planner

DATE: February 10, 2009

RE: Transportation Safety Commission Minutes for February 2, 2009 Meeting

The Transportation Safety Commission met on Thursday January 8, 2009, 9AM, at the Department of Public Transportation, 475 E Washington St.

Members and Advisory Members present included: Bill Blessing (chairman), Calvin Ferrell (citizen), Len Van Wyk (citizen), Ben Wyse (citizen), Lee Eschelman (JMU), Sgt. Felicia Glick (Sherriff's Office), Officer Greg Deeds (Police), Thanh Dang (Public Works), Aaron Smith-Walter (Public Transportation)

Guests present: Wanda Willis (Fire), Jeremy Martin (Public Transportation), Dave Garber (Public Transportation)

Citizens are always provided the opportunity to voice their views/concerns about any item before the commission. It is the policy of the Commission to move the agenda item to the beginning of the meeting when citizens attend Commission meetings to avoid detaining citizens for the entire meeting. However, any citizen is welcome to stay for the entire meeting.

Welcome

1. Special Presentation: Safe Kids Grant for Distracted Drivers

Ms. Willis, with the Fire Department and Safe Kids of the Central Shenandoah Valley, came to share the Distracted Drivers Grant received from Safe Kids USA. Signage was received and installed on W Market St near Thomas Harrison Middle School that alerts drivers that distracted driving behaviors are dangerous. A survey was conducted by Police Officers in unmarked cars, three times in the morning and three times in the afternoons around the times school was starting/ending, each for one hour. This

initial survey found that of 3146 vehicles (one of which was a motorcycle), 91 drivers were eating or drinking, 184 drivers were talking on their cell phone, 14 drivers were reading, 63 drivers were reaching or looking behind them, and 9 drivers were accessorizing. There were also some drivers doing more than one thing at the same time.

Last month a “Food” sign with a “ø” symbol to discourage distracted driving practices was put up and in the next several months signs for Coffee, Cell Phone, and Make Up will be put up. A second set of surveys will be conducted in May to measure the effectiveness of these warning signs.

There are plans to reuse the signs around other schools in the future. Mr. Blessing suggested that the data collected by Safe Kids may be useful to the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (HRMPO) Bicycle-Pedestrian education committee. The HRMPO has funds dedicated to motorist, bicyclist, and pedestrian education and for the last several years has been using radio PSAs.

Note: Safe Kids asked that this survey not be discussed too much and that the media not cover this story until after the final survey, so that an accurate measure of signage effectiveness can be measured.

2. Special Presentation: Public Transportation Department –“Bus Routing”

Mr. Garber and Mr. Martin presented to the Commission the VersaTran software the Public Transportation Department uses to route school buses. Public Transportation provides service to K-12 students. Students in grades K-4 are picked up within 0.5 miles of their home and students grades 5-12 are picked up within 0.3 miles of their home. Students in grades 5-12 (Middle & High School) are picked up together in the morning. There are between 160-170 bus routes.

It was noted that in other localities school buses are generally operated by the school district. In Harrisonburg, the school buses are operated by a different administrative body, Department of Public Transportation. There was some discussion about fuel economy and the number of stops school buses must make.

A commission member asked if motorists frequently run stop arms on a stopped school bus and the response was yes. When this occurs, if the bus driver is able to catch the vehicles license plate number and make/color of the vehicle, this information is submitted to the Police Department who runs the tag numbers and sends a warning notice via certified mail. There was some discussion about increased community/motorist education needed, especially after the summer and winter breaks. Sgt. Glick mentioned a possible grant opportunity to purchase a camera which is installed on the bus to photograph vehicles running stop arms.

Old Business

3. Bluestone Hills Drive Neighborhood Traffic Calming

No update. Public Works and Police Department staff meeting with the Bluestone Hills Neighborhood later that evening.

4. Northeast Neighborhood

Ms. Dang shared that Public Works staff is currently reviewing stop sign placement. Some signs appear to be unusually far from street corners, but underground utilities need to be checked. Guide wires from utility poles may also be the reason for existing stop sign placement. Public Works staff is also working on a Community Development Block Grant application for sidewalks on Gay Street. Sterling Street will be delayed until next year due to right-of-way issues that need to be resolved.

Parking too close to corners was also discussed, but no good suggestions were determined for recommendation at this time. Ms. Dang will explore this further with City staff and bring suggestions back to the Commission.

5. Motorists vs. Crosswalks

Ms. Dang presented to the Commission that Public Works staff and Mr. Eshelman will be further examining the High & Grace St intersection. Ms. Dang presented data that was requested at the last meeting: The High & Grace St crossing has a 7 second walk, 26 second clearance (orange hand) and is 102 feet long across High St, allowing pedestrians a 4ft/second pace ($102\text{ft}/26\text{sec} = 4\text{ft/sec}$). A 3.5 ft/sec pace is typical. Public Works staff believes there may be opportunities to change the light phasing so that there are fewer possible motorist/pedestrian conflicts.

At the Port Republic Rd & Main St intersection, Public Works' Traffic Engineering staff indicated that an all-red pedestrian walk would delay the intersection to a level of service (LOS) F from its current LOS C and should be considered a last resort. Public Works staff is exploring further and appropriate opportunities for signage at specified intersections that may say "State law: yield to pedestrians in crosswalk" or similar language. Other ideas welcome.

Also noted was that in considering an all-red pedestrian phase, the volume of pedestrians at the given intersection is a large factor.

New Business

No new business.

Other Business/Announcements

Commission members inquired about traffic patterns around Erickson Ave- Stone Spring Rd Phase I. Ms. Dang will email the commission these details. Additional information also available at www.ericksonstonespring.org.

NEXT MEETING: Thursday, March 5, 2009, 9AM, at the Department of Planning & Community Development, 409 S Main Street.

Adjourned